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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1695

RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1774

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 JEDDAH 000164

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHARAHAN; DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KISL](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: MOSQUE SERMONS FOR SAUDI ARABIA FEBRUARY 29 AND MARCH 7 AND 14: EASTERN PROVINCE, MECCA, AND MEDINA

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Patricia Aguilera for Reasons 1 .4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY: In the Eastern Province on February 29 and March 7, Sheikh Mohammed Saleh al-Munajjid at the Omar bin Abd al-Aziz Grand Mosque condemned the Danish newspapers that reprinted in late February Muhammad cartoons, criticized Muslims who supported the West, and called on the Muslim community to avoid "irrational reaction" to the cartoons, citing instead the promotion of inter-faith dialogue.

(COMMENT: On March 7 for the first time, a Riyadh sports club used a Soccer sporting event to promote Islam. END COMMENT.) The following week the Imam warned Muslims against celebrating Muhammad's birthday, deeming it "haram" (forbidden). (NOTE: Other Sunni Muslim and Muslim majority countries celebrate Muhammad's birthday as a national holiday. END NOTE.)

¶2. (U) In Mecca on March 7 Sheikh Salih Al Talib focused on describing the difference between "good" and "evil," and on March 14, Sheikh bin Ibrahim al Shuraym discussed the proper use of one's finances as well as the importance of economic independence (no foreign control of resources) of the "Islamic nation." In Medina in his March 7 sermon, Sheikh Husayn Al Al-Shaykh argued that a "fierce war" is ongoing against Islam and Muslims, and that adherence to Islam will allow the "Islamic nation" to prevail. The following week, Sheikh Abd-al-Muhsin Bin-Muhammad Al Qasim spoke on acknowledging the creations of God, adding that God will only "praise" those who do so. (NOTE: The February 29 Mecca and Medina sermons were unavailable. END NOTE.) END SUMMARY.

Eastern Province

CONDEMNS DANISH NEWSPAPERS, BLAMES "ZIONISTS"

¶3. (C) Sheikh Mohammed Saleh al-Munajjid on February 29 at the Omar bin Abd al-Aziz Grand Mosque started his sermon by condemning the Danish newspapers that reprinted in late February the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad as "a terrorist, violent, and ugly." He attributed the newspapers' decision to publish the cartoons to "a power or a conspiracy at work...." He argued that Israeli actions in Gaza, coupled with massive media campaigns in the West "to defame the Prophet," indicated that "Zionists and their supporters" were waging a war against Islam. He also criticized western human rights bodies for not addressing the cartoons republishing.

¶4. (C) Criticizing Muslims who support the West, he said that they should rethink their perceptions of the West if their concept of freedom of expression permits the publishing of cartoons that "...were meant to humiliate and insult an entire religion...." He also argued that there is a different standard for Judaism and Christianity. He then called on "the apologists" that have "... strayed away from their religion to search for worldly gains and pleasures," to return to Islam.

CAUTIONS AGAINST "IRRATIONAL REACTION"

¶5. (C) On March 7 at the Omar bin Abd al-Aziz Grand Mosque Sheikh al-Munajjid again spoke about the cartoons republishing and urged Muslims to unite against any "...provocations meant to humiliate and belittle Islam, the religion, and its Prophets...." However, he cautioned against "irrational reaction," which he said can only be counterproductive, and instead encouraged measures such as opening inter-faith dialogue. He stated that a dialogue would include benefits such as "winning the sympathy and support of many non-Muslims," and "helping to marginalize and isolate the many extremists among them who seek to destroy Islam." He also urged Muslims to "use their brains" and to consider "unified measures to counter attacks," such as translating the Koran "into as many languages as they can without wasting much time."

¶6. (C) COMMENT: After the Crown Prince's Soccer Cup March 7 game in Riyadh, the Muslim players of Riyadh's Hilal Club wore jerseys displaying messages of support for the Prophet Muhammad as they walked to receive their winners' medals. This is the first time a Saudi sports club has used a sports

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event for religious purposes. Local and pan Arab press, and Arab TV sports channels covered positively the event. END COMMENT

WARN AGAINST CELEBRATING MUHAMMAD'S BIRTHDAY

¶7. (C) Sheikh al-Munajjid during the March 14 sermon warned Muslims against celebrating the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. He spoke on Muhammad's birth and death dates, stating that they have always caused debate among scholars and that "no Muslim can with any measure of certainty pinpoint and determine those dates." He then condemned Muslims who celebrate the Prophet's birthday, usually with public celebration such as marching bands. He described the act as "bid'a" (innovation that has no basis in Islamic jurisprudence) and thus "haram" (forbidden).

¶8. (C) NOTE: In accordance with the Hanbali school -- the most fundamentalist of the four Sunni schools of religious law -- Saudi Arabia does not recognize the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and consequently prohibits celebration of it. However, in many other Sunni Muslim and Muslim majority countries, such as Egypt, India, Morocco, Bahrain, and Eritrea, his birthday is a national holiday. END NOTE

Mecca

DISCUSSES "GOOD" VS "EVIL," CRITICIZES THOSE WHO MISUSE JIHAD

¶9. (U) At the Mecca Grand Mosque on March 7 Sheikh Salih Al Talib raised the importance of knowing the difference between "good" and "evil," adding that it is "a legal must, a religious duty, and one of the principles of Islam." He said "virtue, justice, and the truth" were "good," whereas "vice, falsehood, and injustice" were "evil." He then stated: "enablement cannot take place by killing Muslims...or by collecting money to plot against security and disunite people. You will become sad when you see that some people still believe that corruption is jihad and that the only

remaining enemies are fellow citizens and homelands to shed their blood and destroy their interests."

ON THE ROLE OF ISLAM IN ACQUISITION AND USE OF PERSONAL WEALTH

¶10. (U) Sheikh Saud bin Ibrahim al Shuraym in a March 14 Sermon spoke on the role of Islam and faith in ensuring proper use of one's wealth. He stated that money was a material development and that if "religion, content, and satisfaction" did not govern its use, it would instill "poisonous voracity and hateful avarice." He added that God would not judge the individual by the amount of money they possess, but rather on their intent and the way in which they earn it. He continued: "Money is a two-edged weapon: For the people of Islam and faith who have good intentions, it is a grace for which they continuously praise God. For the people of infidelity, it is bitterness and distress...because they do not use it in its real place."

CONCERNING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INDEPENDENCE FROM "FOREIGN CONTROL"

¶11. (U) Switching to a related topic, Sheikh al Shuraym argued that "Islam provides guarantees and pillars to achieve and sustain economic development," which he defined as a rejection of "economic subservience to the foreigner." He continued: "the Islamic nation...is suffering from economic chaos and development weakness," which "...leads to political and social instability." As a result, he argued, "economic development in the Muslim society cannot take place without economic independence and the local development that is free of foreign control."

Medina

REGARDING THE "WAR" AGAINST ISLAM AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

¶12. (U) Sheikh Husayn Al Al-Shaykh at the Medina Grand Mosque on March 7 focused his sermon on "the fierce war the enemies of Islam and Muslims launched against" the religion. He said

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that despite how long such a struggle may be, falsehood would vanish and adherence to Islam would end the "catastrophes" of the Islamic nation. As examples of such struggles he cited the situation in Gaza and alluded to the republishing of the Danish Muhammad cartoons, stating: "We and all believers were saddened by the offenses the rancorous and envious ones made against the master of mankind and the best creature (Muhammad)."

¶13. (U) On March 14 at the Medina Grand Mosque Sheikh Abd-al-Muhsin Bin-Muhammad Al Qasim highlighted the importance of reflecting on the creations of God, adding that God will "praise" those who do and "dispraise" those who do not.

AGUILERA